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ABSTRACT

Arguing that ethics is an important part of technical communication, this book discusses ethics in the broad sense including not only the act of communication but also where technical information came from and how it likely will be used. It is intended for advanced undergraduate and graduate audiences, and assumes some familiarity with technical communication. The book aims to stimulate class discussion and reflection on the ethical dimension of technical communication. It has three major sections. The first section covers the theory and history of ethics. Chapter 1 explains what ethics is; chapter 2 reveals the connection between ethics and communication or rhetoric; and chapter 3 summarizes some of the major ethical theories. The second section presents four real, complex technical communication situations in detail and applies the major ethical theories to them. Chapter 4 is titled "Nazi Records: The Origin and Use of Information"; chapter 5 is "Challenger Disaster: Information vs. Meaning"; chapter 6 is "Tobacco and Death: When Is a Cause Not a Cause"; and chapter 7 is "Star Wars: Hope vs. Reality." The third section consists of a single chapter that presents six hypothetical cases dealing with ethical issues in realistic but fictional technical communication situations. Possible ethical appraisals of these hypothetical cases are sketched at the end of the chapter. Each chapter involving cases includes a detailed ethical appraisal of the material focused on in the chapter. Also included at the end of each chapter is a set of topics for class discussions or for course papers, and Web sites for research and additional topics. (SR)

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